

*Voluntary Brotherhood: Confraternities of Laymen in Early Modern Ukraine*, by Iaroslav Isaievych (Edmonton, Toronto: Canadian Inst. of Ukrainian Studies P., 2006; pp. xxxi + 324. \$49.95).

This volume is a revised English translation of a classic work of twentieth-century Ukrainian historiography, first published just over forty years ago as *Bratstva ta ikh rol' v rozvytku ukrains'koï kul'tury XVI-XVIII st.* (Kyïv, 1966), and familiar to several generations of early-modern historians of Ukraine. Professor Isaievych's introduction to the revised version throws fascinating light on the history of the book's publication under the watchful eye of Soviet-era censorship that had not lost its bite even in the comparatively milder conditions of the 1960s 'thaw'. A tightrope-walk combination of civic courage, academic integrity and ingenuity on the part of the author was necessary to ensure both its publication and the continuation of his career as a professional historian. The work was based on a wealth of published and unpublished documentary material, and examined the history of Orthodox lay confraternities and their place in Ukrainian cultural life from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

*EHR*, cxxiii. 505 (Dec. 2008)

It is therefore inevitable that any assessment of the present work should be conducted against the backdrop of its venerable predecessor. For all its merits, the 1966 edition belonged to a different age and a different place, and its text required a good deal more than the cosmetic revision it receives here. The book's general structure with its mixture of thematic and chronological approaches remains almost entirely unchanged, with the sole exception of a sixth chapter added to the original five. The English edition thus treats (1) the origins of the confraternities, (2) their social composition and organisation, (3) their public role, (4) their efforts to promote education, (5) their publishing activity, and, finally, (6) the archives of the confraternities (though this would have been better incorporated in the bibliography as a note on the sources). The chapters by and large also retain their original form: the main theme is narrated chronologically, while numerous ancillary topics, with a chronology of their own, are introduced along the way. These structural problems reflect a perceptible imbalance in the nature of the sources, the bulk of which relate to the Lviv Dormition Confraternity. Isaievych frankly admits in his introduction to the English translation that the original study had been conceived—and its first draft executed—as that of the Lviv Brotherhood, and he was only later persuaded by the publisher to add 'some material on other towns' (p. xxiv). Granted, the Lviv Confraternity was the first, and for a time remained the most important, of the Orthodox lay brotherhoods both in Ukraine and Belarus, and it provided the template for all similar foundations. Only the Lviv Confraternity can boast of an archive that goes back to the sixteenth century and has survived largely intact. Accidental fires, negligence and wars had seen to it that no other Ukrainian confraternity of note had the same advantage. Unfortunately, the author has not taken the opportunity offered by this revised edition to address this imbalance. A surprising number of jarring out-of-date notions have also been retained in the new edition. For example, the author has not tried to reconsider the old thesis about the aggressively anti-clerical stance of the confraternities. This is coupled with the argument that their refusal to accept the special status of canonically ordained priests and bishops, desire to facilitate access for the laity to the Bible, attempts to purge certain religious practices that had no biblical justification and to control the morals of the faithful, and even to take over the powers of excommunication, had less to do with the European Reformation trends than some 'local conditions' (p. 101).

The author's exasperating disregard for the importance of the religious aspect can be gleaned already from the book's title, which neglects to refer to the confessional affiliation of the confraternities. Even more baffling is the persistence of the spectre of the class struggle that still looms large in the book: social antagonisms between burghers and clergy, burghers and nobility, burghers and rich merchants, still seem to have more significance attached to them than the system of checks and balances, which reflected the social dynamic of 'reciprocity within inequality', characteristic of the early modern period (see, for example, W. Taylor, *Magistrates of the sacred: priests and parishioners in eighteenth-century Mexico*, Stanford, CA, 1996, p. 6). Petty snags such as a somewhat indiscriminate use of terminology, footnotes going awry in Chapter Six and a few clumsily constructed sentences, should have been eliminated at the proof-reading stage and are probably the publisher's responsibility. On the whole, bearing in mind that scholars are not exactly

1548

BOOK REVIEWS

spoiled for choice when it comes to books on early modern Ukraine published in English, it is a pity that a revised version of this classic does not exceed expectations.

doi:10.1093/ehr/cen307

LIUDMILA V. CHARIPOVA  
*University of Nottingham*